



# The Middle East Partnership Initiative

## *Seventeen MEPI University Partnerships Strengthen Regional Universities*

February 2006

**From creating the first engineering curriculum** in Saudi Arabia to reducing Tunisia's shortage of qualified faculty in computer science, the **MEPI University Partnerships Program**, administered by the

Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development (ALO), has grown to 17 partnerships in less than three years. Eight partnerships were selected in 2003; funding for another seven was approved in 2004; and MEPI announced the newest two projects in 2005.

The objectives of the University Partnership program are to expand cooperatively the administrative and managerial capacity of the regional universities as well as to improve the quality of faculty instruction, student research and materials acquisition. Awards are given to partnerships that leverage the expertise of both faculties and best practices in those areas key to the development of politically inclusive and economically growing societies. In some cases, local business or civil society partners extend the range of cooperation beyond the university setting and encourage a multi-disciplinary approach.

American students profit as well from the expanded partnership. For instance, at the University of Michigan – Dearborn, U.S. students and faculty will participate in an intensive summer institute in American and Arab American Study programs in May 2006 to be attended by some of their Palestinian counterparts from Al-Quds University (West Bank/Gaza). The following month exchanges will flow in the other direction as the Palestinian

### **U.S.-Middle East University Partnerships**

- in Business and Economics (4)
- in Education (5)
- in Information and Communication Technologies (5)
- in Media and Journalism (2)
- in Gender Studies (1)

university assumes the leadership to develop the second such institute in Jerusalem. A visiting scholar from the University of Jordan will teach Arab literature at the University of North Carolina, the first of several such visiting scholar projects.

The University Partnership is also a useful tool for helping countries build the professional skills needed for journalism students and to further their countries' capacity to absorb a democratic press. Bowling Green State University and the *Institut de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information* at the University de la Manouba in Tunisia are creating a core curriculum studying international and democratic media and providing advanced online research capacity as well as an opportunity to develop communication and investigative reporting skills.

**Newest Awards in 2005:** MEPI introduced three new disciplines to meet evolving strategies responding to the needs of society while preparing graduates for the challenges of the modern era: Gender Studies, Government, and Legal Studies.

The latest two University Partnerships have been awarded to projects in teacher education and gender studies. Northern Kentucky University and the United Arab Emirates University will lead a consortium of four other universities (two American and two Arab) to improve the curriculum for teacher training. To reduce the gender gap in Egypt, the first ever Master's degree program in Women in Development is being set up at Menoufia University in partnership with the University of Connecticut.

**MEPI** is a Presidential initiative that supports economic, political, and educational reform efforts and women's empowerment in the Middle East and expanded opportunity for all people of the region.

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